

Testimony before the Appropriations Committee

February 24, 2022

DMHAS BUDGET HEARING

**H.B. No. 5037 AN ACT ADJUSTING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM
ENDING JUNE 30, 2023**

Karen Healy

Good evening Senator Osten, Rep Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee.

My name is Karen Healy, I live and vote in Hartford and I'm involved with Keep The Promise Coalition and Disability Rights Connecticut. I'm here to share my personal testimony regarding the governor's budget.

I spent most of my life institutionalized in Poughkeepsie, New York, and Connecticut Valley Hospital for self-injurious behavior starting from age 16 in 1989, until December 4, 2014.

State funded services are important to me because I am able to live in a community setting, which I believe is less expensive and more supportive to me than if I were in a psychiatric hospital.

I want to thank the Governor for investing money to discharge more people from CVH, but I believe there needs to be even more funding to discharge people and that we need more funding for community nonprofits to support people in their communities.

When I was discharged from CVH, people doubted me. They expected me to be back at CVH in one or two weeks following my discharge. I only had two choices for supportive housing when I left, and it was difficult to get out. CVH isn't set up to help people get back into their community. Fortunately, there were a number of staff who did believe in me. It was through their efforts, as well as my family, that I was able to be discharged from CVH December 4th of 2014.

While I was at CVH, I suffered from a hip injury which required surgery. During my final case conference there, my mother, who at the time, was my conservator of

person and estate, was told to never let me have my hip surgery because it was believed that I could not handle the surgery.

I have gone through many weeks of withdrawal from the high dose of narcotics I was given while at CVH. While these narcotics were prescribed to me to recover from my hip injury, the staff overused these drugs to keep me calm and I became addicted. The medical way of treating mental health only caused me more harm.

By keeping people at CVH and not discharging them, this system is making their lives even worse than they were before they were admitted. The worst thing to do is to keep people in institutions. I believe more funding needs to be put into getting people out of CVH, and back into their community.

I would also like to commend the Governor for continuing to fund supportive housing and wrap around services, but I think this budget should go further to make sure there's much more secure and stable funding for these services.

My current level of support from Goodwill Incorporated, a residential support program, allows me to live in the community which is less costly than a state psychiatric hospital bed. I am able to live in the community and contribute to my day to day living expenses which I couldn't do if I were in a state psychiatric hospital.

It's been over 7 years since I was discharged from CVH. Living in the community has allowed me to live the life I want to live. I have had my hip surgery. I am no longer in need of a wheelchair or walker. I now have a paid part-time job. I also volunteer at my church. I've also received two legislative citations and an inspiration award from Goodwill. If I was still at CVH, I wouldn't be able to see my family. I wouldn't be able to see my nephews soccer games, visit my nephews and nieces, or be there for them as their aunt. Living in the community instead of living at CVH has meant I can have these connections with my family and live the life I want to live.

I believe the DMHAS budget should put more funding into community solutions and supportive housing such as my residential support program at Goodwill. This program is funded through a grant from DMHAS. There are currently staffing issues across the whole community nonprofit world, and if these programs are not

fully funded, funding for my program could get cut and I could end up back at CVH. Please increase the funding for community nonprofits in the DMHAS budget.

I am also concerned that much of the funding in this budget is temporary. This year, everyone can recognize that mental health matters. But when this funding goes away, mental health will still matter. We need to make sure that this funding and these services don't just disappear after a few years. If some of these programs or funding go away, I'm worried it could affect my program and I could end up back at CVH.

I also support fully funding DMHAS legal services. Connecticut Legal Rights Project helped me when I wasn't getting help from the clinical team at CVH. Many people there have their own experience with mental health and that made me feel more comfortable and honest about my situation to get the legal help I needed.

People should not be judged because they have a long-term psychiatric illness. Everyone deserves the chance to be treated well and have as normal a life as possible. Even though I have a mental health issue, and I deal with my issues in a different way than other people, I'm just as human as everyone else.

I would like to say thank you to the legislators for listening to my testimony. I hope that you have seen the importance of increasing the budget this year and providing more funding for community mental health services.